

Sunday, June 28th 2026

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost



Mailing Address:

**Epiphany Lutheran Church
489 Agnes
Suite 112, Box 117
Bastrop, TX 78602**

Physical Address:

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124 Three Oaks Lane
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WELCOME TO EPIPHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH!

“How lovely is Your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts!”
(Psalm 84:1) We are thankful that God has brought you here with us this morning to hear His Word and receive His gifts! You’ll find everything you need for the worship service in this bulletin and in *Lutheran Service Book*, our hymnal. If you have any questions about our worship service, our congregation, or what we believe, please ask our pastor or any of our members.



OUR COMMUNION POLICY:

The Lord’s Supper is celebrated at this congregation by baptized believers in the confession and glad confidence that, as he says, our Lord gives into our mouths not only bread and wine but his very body and blood to eat and to drink for the forgiveness of sins and to strengthen our union with him and with one another. Our Lord invites to his table those who trust his words, repent of all sin, and set aside any refusal to forgive and love as he forgives and loves us, that they may show forth his death until he comes.

If you are not a member of a congregation in The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, and yet desire to receive Communion, we kindly request that you first speak with our pastor.

SERVANTS DURING WORSHIP THIS MORNING:

Pastor – Rev. E.B. Holschuh
Lay Reader – Rosie Cabrera
Assisting Elder – Clayton Wolf
Usher – Harlan Robb
Acolyte – Calvin Monroe

We are using the Church Music Solutions Church Organist Service, an iPad application that provides us with accompaniment for our worship service. **There is a brief introduction to the musical parts of the liturgy unless otherwise noted.**

AS WE PREPARE FOR WORSHIP THIS MORNING:

The Lord Jesus Brings Division on Earth for the Sake of Peace with God in Heaven

False prophets preach what their hearers want to hear, promising peace even when the Lord has spoken “*war, famine, and pestilence*” (Jer. 28:8). But if “*the LORD has truly sent the prophet,*” he speaks what the Lord has spoken, and “*the word of that prophet comes to pass*” (Jer. 28:9). The preaching of God’s Law is hard, because it confronts sin, brings it to light and makes it worse, “*sinful beyond measure,*” thereby “*producing death*” in the sinner (Rom. 7:13). But through our Baptism into Christ, “*we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive*” (Rom. 7:6). Now we belong “*to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God*” (Rom. 7:4). Belonging to Him puts us at odds with the world and divides us from all earthly ties, not only from our human family, but each person from his own life. For Christ does not come “*to bring peace, but a sword*” (Matt. 10:34). Yet, whoever takes up his cross to follow Christ, and “*loses his life*” for Christ’s sake, finds new life in Him (Matt. 10:38–39).

DIVINE SERVICE SETTING FOUR

Prelude		Selected Music
Welcome and Greeting		Pastor
Announcements		
Opening Hymn	<i>“I Know My Faith Is Founded”</i>	LSB 587
<i>(stand)</i>		

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

The sign of the cross ✠ may be made by all in remembrance of their Baptism.

P In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C Amen.

Matthew 28:19b; [18:20]

P Our help is in the name of the Lord,

C who made heaven and earth.

Psalm 124:8

P If You, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand?

C But with You there is forgiveness; therefore You are feared. *Ps. 130:3-4*

P Since we are gathered to hear God's Word, call upon Him in prayer and praise, and receive the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ in the fellowship of this altar, let us first consider our unworthiness and confess before God and one another that we have sinned in thought, word, and deed, and that we cannot free ourselves from our sinful condition. Together as His people let us take refuge in the infinite mercy of God, our heavenly Father, seeking His grace for the sake of Christ, and saying: God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

[Luke 18:13]

C Almighty God, have mercy upon us, forgive us our sins, and lead us to everlasting life. Amen.

P Almighty God in His mercy has given His Son to die for you and for His sake forgives you all your sins. As a called and ordained servant of Christ, and by His authority, I therefore forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the ✝ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

C Amen.

[John 20:19-23]

SERVICE OF THE WORD

Introit

Psalm 89:15-18

P Blessed are the people who know the festal shout,
who walk, O LORD, in the light of your face,

C who exult in your name all the day
and in your righteousness are exalted.

P For you are the glory of their strength;
by your favor our horn is exalted.

C For our shield belongs to the LORD,
our king to the Holy One of Israel.

*Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning,
is now, and will be forever. Amen.*

Kyrie

Mark 10:47



☐ Lord, have mer - cy; Christ, have mer - cy; Lord, have mer - cy.

Gloria in Excelsis (no intro)

Luke 2:14; John 1:29



☐ 1 To God on high be glo - ry And peace to all the earth;
2 To You, O sole - be - got - ten, The Fa - ther's Son, we pray;
3 For You a - lone are ho - ly; You on - ly are the Lord.



Good-will from God in heav - en Pro - claimed at Je - sus' birth!
O Lamb of God, our Sav - ior, You take our sins a - way.
For - ev - er and for - ev - er, Be wor - shipped and a - dored;



We praise and bless You, Fa - ther; Your ho - ly name, we sing—
Have mer - cy on us, Je - sus; Re - ceive our heart - felt cry,
You with the Ho - ly Spir - it A - lone are Lord Most High,



Our thanks for Your great glo - ry, Lord God, our heav'n - ly King.
Where You in pow'r are seat - ed At God's right hand on high—
In God the Fa - ther's glo - ry. "A - men!" our glad re - ply.

Salutation and Collect of the Day

P The Lord be with you.

2 Timothy 4:22

C **And also with you.**

P Let us pray.

Almighty God, by the working of Your Holy Spirit, grant that we may gladly hear Your Word proclaimed among us and follow its directing; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C **Amen.**

(sit)

Old Testament Reading

Jeremiah 28:5-9

⁵Then the prophet Jeremiah spoke to Hananiah the prophet in the presence of the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the LORD, ⁶and the prophet Jeremiah said, “Amen! May the LORD do so; may the LORD make the words that you have prophesied come true, and bring back to this place from Babylon the vessels of the house of the LORD, and all the exiles. ⁷Yet hear now this word that I speak in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people. ⁸The prophets who preceded you and me from ancient times prophesied war, famine, and pestilence against many countries and great kingdoms. ⁹As for the prophet who prophesies peace, when the word of that prophet comes to pass, then it will be known that the LORD has truly sent the prophet.”

A This is the Word of the Lord.

C **Thanks be to God.**

Epistle Reading

Romans 7:1-13

¹Or do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law is binding on a person only as long as he lives? ²Thus a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives, but if her husband dies she is released from the law of marriage. ³Accordingly, she will be called an adulteress if she lives with another man while her husband is alive. But if her husband dies, she is free from that law, and if she marries another man she is not an adulteress.

⁴Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the

dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God. ⁵For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. ⁶But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit.

⁷What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." ⁸But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law, sin lies dead. ⁹I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. ¹⁰The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. ¹¹For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. ¹²So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.

¹³Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure.

A This is the Word of the Lord.

C Thanks be to God.

(stand)

Alleluia and Verse



C Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.



C These things are writ - ten that you may be - lieve that



Je - sus is the Christ, the Son of God.

John 20:31



C Al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia.

Holy Gospel Reading

Matthew 10:34-42

P The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew, the tenth chapter.

C **Glory to You, O Lord.**

³⁴[Jesus said:] “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. ³⁶And a person’s enemies will be those of his own household. ³⁷Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

⁴⁰“Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. ⁴¹The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person’s reward. ⁴²And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.”

P This is the Gospel of the Lord.

C **Praise to You, O Christ.**

(sit)

Hymn of the Day

“Let Us Ever Walk with Jesus”

LSB 685

Sermon

More than Me

Matthew 10:34-42

(stand)

Nicene Creed

**☐ I believe in one God,
the Father Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth
and of all things visible and invisible.**

**And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only-begotten Son of God,
begotten of His Father before all worlds,
God of God, Light of Light,
very God of very God,
begotten, not made,
being of one substance with the Father,
by whom all things were made;
who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven
and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary
and was made man;
and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate.
He suffered and was buried.
And the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures
and ascended into heaven
and sits at the right hand of the Father.
And He will come again with glory to judge both the living and
the dead,
whose kingdom will have no end.**

**And I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord and giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and
glorified,
who spoke by the prophets.
And I believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church,
I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins,
and I look for the resurrection of the dead
and the life ✝ of the world to come. Amen.**

Passing of the Peace

(sit)

Reception of New Members

Prayer of the Church

P Lord, in Your mercy
C hear our prayer.

Offering

Usher

(stand)

SERVICE OF THE SACRAMENT

Preface

P The Lord be with you.

2 Timothy 4:22

C And also with you.

P Lift up your hearts.

C We lift them to the Lord.

[Colossians 3:1]

P Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

C It is right to give Him thanks and praise.

[Psalm 136]

P It is truly good, right, and salutary that we should at all times and in all places give thanks to You, O Lord, holy Father, almighty and everlasting God, for the countless blessings You so freely bestow on us and all creation. Above all, we give thanks for Your boundless love shown to us when You sent Your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, into our flesh and laid on Him our sin, giving Him into death that we might not die eternally. Because He is now risen from the dead and lives and reigns to all eternity, all who believe in Him will overcome sin and death and will rise again to new life. Therefore with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven we laud and magnify Your glorious name, evermore praising You and saying:

Sanctus (no intro)

Isaiah 6:3; Matthew 21:9



☐ Ho - ly, ho - ly, ho - ly Lord God of Sab - a - oth a - dored;



Heav'n and earth with full ac-claim shout the glo-ry of Your name.



Sing ho - san-na in the high-est, sing ho-san - na to the Lord;



Tru - ly blest is He who comes in the name of the Lord!

Prayer of Thanksgiving

☐ Blessed are You, O Lord our God, king of all creation, for You have had mercy on us and given Your only-begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.

For Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed. By His death, He has redeemed us from bondage to sin and death, and by His resurrection, He has delivered us into new life in Him.

Grant us to keep the Feast in sincerity and truth, faithfully eating His body given into death and drinking His life's blood poured out for our salvation until we pass through death to the promised land of life eternal.

Hear us as we pray in His name and as He has taught us:

C Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be Thy name,
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth
as it is in heaven;
give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For Thine is the kingdom
and the power and the glory
forever and ever. Amen.

The Words of Our Lord

*Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24
Luke 22:19-20; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25*

- P** Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to the disciples and said: "Take, eat; this is My ✠ body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me."
- P** In the same way also He took the cup after supper, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying: "Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the new covenant in My ✠ blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

Pax Domini

John 20:19

- P** The peace of the Lord be with you always.
C Amen.

Agnus Dei

John 1:29



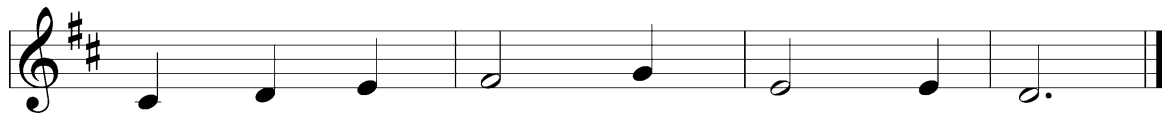
1 O Je - sus Christ, true Lamb of God,
2 O Je - sus Christ, true Lamb of God,



You take the sin of the world a - way;
You take the sin of the world a - way;



O Je - sus Christ, true Lamb of God,
Have mer - cy on us, Je - sus Christ,



Have mer - cy on us, Lord, we pray.
And grant us peace, O Lord, we pray.

(sit)

Distribution Hymns

“The Church’s One Foundation”
“Sent Forth by God’s Blessing”

LSB 644
LSB 643

(stand)

Nunc Dimittis

Luke 2:29-32

1 O Lord, now let Your ser - vant De -
2 All glo - ry to the Fa - ther, All
part in heav'n - ly peace, For I have seen the
glo - ry to the Son, All glo - ry to the
glo - ry Of Your re - deem - ing grace:
Spir - it, For - ev - er Three in One;
A light to lead the Gen - tiles Un -
For as in the be - gin - ning, Is
to Your ho - ly hill, The glo - ry of Your
now, shall ev - er be, God's tri - une name re -
peo - ple, Your cho - sen Is - ra - el.
sound - ing Through all e - ter - ni - ty.

Post-Communion Collect

P Let us pray.

We give thanks to You, almighty God, that You have refreshed us through this salutary gift, and we implore You that of Your mercy You would strengthen us through the same in faith toward You and in fervent love toward one another; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

C Amen.

Benedicamus and Benediction

P Let us bless the Lord.

[Psalm 103:1]

C Thanks be to God.

P The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make His face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look upon you with favor and ✠ give you peace.

Numbers 6:24-26

C Amen.

(sit)

Closing Hymn

“Preserve Your Word, O Savior”

LSB 658

P Go in Peace!

C Serve the Lord!

Postlude

Selected Music

Initial and ongoing funding for Epiphany Lutheran Church has been received through a grant made possible by the Roy D. and Ingaborg G. Randolph Memorial Endowment Fund.



CATECHISM CORNER | *Bite-sized teachings from Luther's Small Catechism*

Written in 1529 in Q&A format, the Small Catechism explores the Six Chief Parts of Christian Doctrine: the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, Confession, and the Sacrament of the Altar.

CHRISTIAN QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

19. *What should admonish and incite a Christian to receive the Sacrament frequently?*

In respect to God, both the command and the promise of Christ the Lord should move him; and in respect to himself, the trouble that lies heavy on him, on account of which such command, encouragement, and promise are given.

20. *But what shall a person do if he is not aware of such trouble and feels no hunger and thirst for the Sacrament?*

To such a person no better advice can be given than that, in the first place, he put his hand into his bosom, and feel whether he still have flesh and blood, and that he by all means believe what the Scriptures say of it in Galatians 5 and Romans 7. Secondly, that he look around to see whether he is still in the world, and keep in mind that there will be no lack of sin and trouble, as the Scriptures say in John 15 and 16; 1 John 2 and 5. Thirdly, he will certainly have the devil also about him, who with his lying and murdering, day and night, will let him have no peace within or without, as the Scriptures picture him in John 8 and 16; 1 Peter 5; Ephesians 6; 2 Timothy 2.

SERMON NOTES: Matthew 10:34-42

More than Me

1. To truly and sincerely follow Jesus means to put God first, to love Jesus more than one's _____, one's _____, one's _____.
2. Jesus knew that his _____ would find bearers, but at the same time cause divisions in _____, even among _____.
3. Our _____ is to be lived out by putting God _____, by loving Him with all of our _____!
4. Christians are called to occupy _____ place after God, _____, and neighbor—this includes biological family—_____.
5. Intentions come from our _____ choice, but a _____ is accomplished only through the _____ of God.
6. _____ we give up for Jesus does not compare to _____ he gives back. Do you _____ that statement?

INTERESTED IN BECOMING A MEMBER?

The first step to becoming a member of our congregation is to speak with our pastor.

We believe, teach, and confess that we are all broken sinners in need of God's salvation, which He freely gives through His Word and Sacrament. Church is not a club for the sinless— it's a hospital for sinners!

You may become a member of Epiphany Lutheran Church by transferring your membership from a sister congregation of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) or you may receive instruction from the pastor and become a communicant member of Epiphany and the LCMS through Adult Instruction Class or through a profession of faith.

Epiphany Events Calendar: Our congregation calendar is on our website (epiphanybastrop.org); to add an event, please email secretary@epiphanybastrop.org.

Offering: Should you wish to make your regular tithe or offering online, you may do so at <https://secure.myvanco.com/L-ZKYH/home> or scan this QR code.



9am Adult Sunday School: Join us as we continue the video study, *Drive Thru History: Ends of the Earth*. We're following host Dave Stotts as he travels the globe to tell the 2,000-year story of how the Gospel of Jesus Christ reached the Ends of the Earth.

Join us **TOMORROW at 6pm** for another **one-hour, one time FLASH STUDY** on Zoom: **Don't Ask AI to Save Your Soul**— we'll watch a short video and look at what AI can do well, where it falls short, and why God's inspired Word remains the Christian's ultimate source of truth, wisdom, and salvation. (There'll be plenty of room—pass it on.!) Register: bit.ly/ELC-BibleAI

Last week marked the start of a **90-day challenge to add \$10,000 to our building fund!** This came about because we were approached by a potential donor (not a member) who offered to match this amount if we can do it. *Can we?!* We'll announce whether we reached our goal or not on Sunday, 9/13. If you'd like to contribute, please note Building Fund on your check or envelope.

Lutheran Radio: Hear The Lutheran Hour each Sunday on station KBUK-FM 104.9 at 7:00 a.m. or on station KANJ-FM 91.5 at 12:30 p.m. or go to lhm.org for a link to listen to the Lutheran Hour live. You can also listen to The Lutheran Hour on the local Austin station KLBK (590 AM or 99.7 FM) at 7am on Sunday.

KFUO Radio, the broadcast voice of The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, shares Christ for you anytime, anywhere on **KFUO.org** via worship services, Bible and theology studies, practical talk programs, and sacred music. Find programs on demand at kfu.org and wherever you get your podcasts! Find us on social: [@KFUOradio](https://twitter.com/KFUOradio) on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/KFUOradio), [Twitter](https://twitter.com/KFUOradio), and [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/KFUOradio).

RightNow Media: Every person in our Epiphany family has (and can share) free access to over 25,000 biblical video series for adults, youth, and kids—**RightNow Media** has a free app that’s available on all major streaming devices so you and your family can access content anywhere, anytime. Visit app.rightnowmedia.org/join/elcb or scan the QR code.



ChristianBook Giveback Program: Did you know that your purchases at Christianbook can help fund our congregation? Just visit christianbook.com/apps/giveback and enter the Giveback ID for Epiphany Lutheran Church: JQWHTN. After this one-time signup, we’ll be eligible to receive 4% cashback on your purchases.



Epiphany Lutheran Church has a podcast! Our **Peace Be With You** podcast is available on popular podcast apps, but you can always find it at peacebewithyou.podbean.com (or just scan the QR code).



- Answers to Sermon Notes:
1. To truly and sincerely follow Jesus means to put God first, to love Jesus more than one's *parents*, one's *spouse*, one's *children*.
 2. Jesus knew that his *message* would find bearers, but at the same time cause divisions in *society*, even among *families*.
 3. Our *faith* is to be lived out by putting God *first* by loving Him with all of our *being*.
 4. Christians are called to occupy *third* place after God, *first* and neighbor—this includes biological family—*second*.
 5. Intentions come from our *free* choice, but a *deed* is accomplished only through the *grace* of God.
 6. *What* we give up for Jesus does not compare to *what* he gives back. Do you *believe* that statement?

THIS WEEK AT EPIPHANY:

Sunday, June 28th

- 9:00am – Children’s Sunday School
- 9:00am – Adult Sunday School
- 10:00am – Fellowship / Coffee Time
- 10:30am – Worship Service with Communion

Monday, June 29th

- 6:00pm – Flash Study on Zoom: *Don’t Ask AI to Save Your Soul*

Wednesday, July 1st

- 7:00pm – Starting Point: *A Conversation About Faith*

Sunday, July 5th

- 9:00am – Children’s Sunday School
- 9:00am – Adult Sunday School
- 10:00am – Fellowship / Coffee Time
- 10:30am – Worship Service with Communion

PRAYERS AT EPIPHANY

PRAYER REQUESTS: Please share any prayer request on the Prayer Requests sheet as you enter on Sunday. You may also email a prayer request, as well as a request to become a part of Epiphany’s prayer chain, to secretary@epiphanybastrop.org.

Please continue to pray for...

- Rev. Roberto and Kathryn Weber and their children Evangelina, Johann, and Johanna – missionaries in the Dominican Republic
- Fey Betak, Francis Eschberger, Jim Haynes, Anita Hickman, Ranita Murphy, Elaine Ottinger, Sally Potthast, Gert Schriener, and all the residents at Argent Court Assisted Living in Bastrop
- Deb and Dave Layland
- Family and Friends of MinnieLee Hendrix – Mother of Jerry Hendrix
- Carl Sneek



Confession and Absolution

There are few words more precious to a Christian than these: "*I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*" Yet many Christians treat Confession and Absolution as an optional practice rather than a vital gift from God.

Confession and Absolution is not merely a church tradition or a moment of emotional release. It is one of the ways Christ delivers His forgiveness to His people—a true Means of Grace, through which God bestows the forgiveness won by Christ on the cross. Jesus himself established this gift when he said to his disciples, "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them" (John 20:23). Through the pastor's words, Christ Himself speaks forgiveness to troubled consciences.

Repentance is not a one-time event but the daily rhythm of the Christian life. Martin Luther begins his Ninety-Five Theses with these famous words: "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'Repent,' He willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance." Christians do not outgrow confession because they do not outgrow sin. Instead, they continually return to the Lord, confessing their sins and hearing anew the promise of forgiveness.

Christians receive this gift both corporately and privately. In the Divine Service, the congregation joins together in confessing sin and hearing the pastor proclaim Christ's forgiveness to all who repent and believe. But there are also times when burdens weigh heavily on the heart—sins that trouble the conscience, habits that seem impossible to break, wounds that need the healing balm of God's Word spoken personally. For such moments, Christ gives the beautiful practice of private confession and absolution. In private confession, the Christian names his sins before God in the presence of the pastor and hears the Gospel addressed directly to him: "*I forgive you all your sins...*" Corporate confession reminds us that we are sinners together; private confession assures us that Christ's forgiveness is for *me* personally, here and now. Both are precious gifts through which God comforts His people and strengthens them in faith.

This is why Confession and Absolution is such a comfort. The devil whispers, "Your sins are too great." Your conscience accuses you. Your failures seem impossible to overcome. But in Absolution, God answers with certainty: *Your sins are forgiven. Christ has died for you. You are His.*

Far from being a burden, confession is freedom. It is the laying down of guilt at the foot of the cross and walking away clothed in Christ's righteousness. It is the Christian's return home, again and again, to the Father who never tires of forgiving.

In a world that encourages excuses, denial, or self-justification, Christians are called to something better: honest repentance and confident faith. For where there is confession, there is forgiveness. Where there is forgiveness, there is peace. And where Christ's forgiveness is received, there is life.